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9 JAN 1958

MEMORANDUM FOR: The Vice President

SUBJECT: Venezuelan Opposition Groups

1. With reference to your inquiries which arose at the 6 January meeting of the National Security Council on the leadership of the recent military revolt in Venezuela and the nature of the Venezuelan opposition, the following additional information is submitted: Junior officers in the Venezuelan Air Force and in several major army units appear to have supplied the backbone of leadership for the revolt. The government has made extensive arrests among the military and 16 rebel officers (including seven with the rank of major) escaped by plane to Colombia. At least four of Venezuela's 19 battalions of ground troops were also involved and the well-trained national guard may have been partially implicated. The navy remained aloof.

2. The top leadership of the revolt has not yet been identified. The air force chief of staff and the army commander are under arrest, either on suspicion of disloyalty or for direct participation in the plot.

3. Among the possible motivating forces behind the revolt are the following: opposition to Perez' indefinite continuance in power; resentment against civilian surveillance of the military through the national security police under the Ministry of Interior; junior officer opposition to or envy of lavish graft among top-ranking officers; subordination of the air force to ground force

*White House*

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control; a general awareness of civilian and church opposition to the regime; genuine desire to relax the stringent controls on internal security and personal liberties; and ambition on the part of rebel officers to attain positions of greater authority.

4. The civilian opposition to the regime probably includes the majority of the politically interested general public, which, however, has appeared to be resigned to Perez' methods and continuance in office. Although closely controlled by the government, organized labor, particularly those unions allowed to operate independently of the official confederation, is apparently largely among the opposition.

5. The outlawed Communist party and leftist Democratic Action (AD) party--largely suppressed and disorganized like all Venezuelan opposition elements--probably retain a sizable following in Venezuela (members, former members, and sympathizers). The AD's clandestine organization, however, is believed relatively ineffective at present. In addition, the Catholic hierarchy has been at odds with the government since last May and its press organ has published the only overt criticism of Perez' regime in recent months. Finally, university and high school students and most of the press have recently demonstrated that they are largely in the ranks of the anti-government forces.

*Signed*

Allen W. Dulles  
Director

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